

From: Kyle Knohl
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/21/02 8:02pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a software engineer and a college student. I hope that by the time I have some experience and have gotten my degree that this monopoly of Microsoft's will no longer be what it is today. I look forward to a future in which I can create applications without fear of being pushed out of business because Microsoft does not like my application moving in on its turf. I have been putting off writing this letter for a long time. I have looked over the documents and talked to friends about the case. I tried to get others to write, but with little luck. One friend said he didn't want to be on Microsoft's blacklist. I think this is a little extreme, but I do not know what Microsoft is capable of.

I wished to comment about this Microsoft case and the settlement that has been proposed by the Department of Justice. This settlement worries me. It seems to me that Microsoft has won a reprieve from any punishment for their actions. The lawyers for the people have not secured many safeguards for their clients. The group of three to oversee Microsoft's actions are half chosen by Microsoft. Even if these three people were able to find instances in which Microsoft had misbehaved, Microsoft seems to have cleverly organized the rules so that it dodges the main things that need to be changed. By getting the rules to exclude the Free Software movement, and safeguarding a few of their main business practices, they dodge much of the power of this group. Anyway, Microsoft seems to be changing its business model into one which dodges the constraints completely, a subscription based model.

Microsoft has long been bullying different companies. The attorneys for the Department of Justice seem to feel that a weak settlement is better than none for a few years. I disagree, I feel that a weak settlement will only lead to another case beginning in a couple years. I also have gotten the feeling, the Department of Justice feels this case is harming the economy. Large controlling monopolies have never been good for our economy. The small innovators are the strength behind capitalism. Microsoft stifles these innovators.

For a long time, I only saw one chance for this monopoly to end, and it had to do with the government punishing and limiting its actions. Two new chances have arisen: the European Commission and the Free Software movement. Neither seem ideal, but they can at least fight against the monopoly. Free Software can fight Microsoft, because Microsoft has nothing to use against it. Taken to an extreme, Free Software could put me out of a job. As time goes on though, Free Software seems more and more attractive. After years of seeing Microsoft control the software of the

world, Free Software seems the only way in which people can have a choice again. This also allows me to create applications of my own without worrying about them being destroyed. The European Commission is the other chance. They have been investigating lately, and could impose a very large fine. A fine, while not enough, would stop Microsoft from pushing its way into markets by taking huge economic losses on their products. Two good examples of this are the 400\$ MSN subscription bonuses and the sale of the Xbox at a 100\$ loss, though I have no way to verify the Xbox practice because I do not know Microsoft's price on the boxes.

Microsoft has control over not just the desktop market but also the office suite market. This allows them to use either one to support the other. I hope that any agreement carries with it a publishing of the formats in the office suite so that compatible products can be made for other operating systems. I know many companies would like to switch to a Unix based desktop but cannot because the Microsoft Word document format is used as a collaboration tool with other companies. Since this format is so convoluted, it is extremely hard to find an application that is compatible enough to use in the business world. By using this fact, they can force unwanted operating systems from the desktop market.

Part of the reason that I waited was to see how Microsoft would behave after the settlement was reached. Their behavior since then has worried me. It feels as if they are going back to their old behaviors. I hope that the conclusion of this case forces Microsoft to acknowledge their wrong-doing and apologize for their behavior. So far, it seems as if Microsoft still feels they have never done wrong. I see contempt for the world in their actions.

Sincerely,
Kyle Knoch